

In Which They Attend The Parade by the-singular-peep

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Friendship, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Mike W., Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-12-17 19:10:52

Updated: 2018-12-17 19:10:52

Packaged: 2019-12-12 23:17:23

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 5,185

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Every year, the Christmas Parade was the light of every kid in Hawkins' life. But this time, two things are different: The Wheelers are fighting, and it is Eleven's first parade. [IN WHICH EVERYTHING IS OKAY SERIES. COMPLETE. PT 15/?. PT. 14: "IN WHICH SHE VISITS MAMA."]

In Which They Attend The Parade

In Which They Attend a Parade

December 28, 1984. Friday.

Every year, the Christmas-to-New-Years Parade was the light of every kid in Hawkins' life. *Especially* the Wheelers. The kids loved the parade, and Ted and Karen would always be exuberant about taking them. And they always got there early, to get the best spots on the square.

Except... Not this year. This year, at four PM, after Mike had put reindeer antlers on Holly and everyone's shoes were tied, Ted and Karen were fighting.

Big time fighting. And it didn't look like they were going to stop before time to leave.

"Mom, c'mon, we're going to be late!" Mike called, antsy for more than one reason. One, it was the Christmas parade, but, more importantly, two, it was Eleven's *first big outing* without Hopper, and the Wheelers were scheduled to pick her up. Mike had been ecstatic, until now. Because now, he wasn't sure if they'd actually go.

Holly whimpered in Nancy's arms. She didn't like the fighting anymore than her older siblings.

"You are good for nothing, Ted! All you do is sit in your recliner, didn't you ever think that *I* needed help?! We have three children, Ted! Three!"

"At least I have a job!"

"You did NOT go there!"

Mike grimaced. He hated when they got like this.

"Maybe you could just take us?" He said to Nancy. She shrugged.

"I could, but I can't drive mom's van. We couldn't pick up all your

little friends in dad's Granada."

"Well, we could..." Mike started, but Nancy shook her head.

"No. No way am I breaking the law *again*. I'm done with that. I am now a good, law abiding citizen."

Mike gaped.

"Tell that to your boyfriend who's *eighteen*."

It was Nancy's turn to gape.

"Okay, we're not doing this right now. I'm taking Holly, and you can tag along if you want, but we can't get four other little gremlins into that car and that's final. Mom!" She called, turning to the kitchen. There was no response. "I'm taking Holly to the parade!"

Still, no response, and Nancy shrugged. "Are you coming?"

Mike huffed, crossing his arms.

"No. I'll find some other way to get there. I'm not leaving my friends behind."

Nancy shrugged. "Suit yourself. See you there, Mikey," Nancy gave him a little smile even though they were arguing, and Mike gave her a grimace back. She grabbed her's and Holly's coats and was out the door before Mike could change his mind.

He sat on the couch and glowered. How could his parents *do* this?! They knew how much he loved going to the parade with all his friends. They *knew* it was Eleven's first time out in a whole year. Well, his mom knew. His dad didn't know much at all about anything. He supposed that was the cause of the argument.

He sat there stewing for a good six minutes before he had an idea. He bounded down the stairs and into the basement, grabbing his supercomm from the still-assembled fort.

"Dustin!" He called. "Dustin, come in! Over."

Dustin responded within seconds.

"You're not on your way yet? Over."

Mike sighed.

"No. Mom and Dad got in a fight and Nancy didn't want to take all of us. Do you have Steve's phone number? Over."

There was a pause.

"Yeah, I got it. Why? Over."

Mike grinned. Maybe this would work.

They arrived at the Hopper residence at half past five, and the parade started at six. Dustin was seated in the front seat, and in the back sat Mike on the left, Will in the middle, and Lucas on the right. They didn't really think this through, and all they knew was that Eleven would sit.... *somewhere* in the backseat. That's as far as planning got, and it had only just occurred to Mike that Hopper was a *cop*. A copwho may enforce the brand-spanking-new seatbelt law.

"I'll - I'll go in and get her." Mike said, opening his door quickly. He blushed a little as Lucas made a kissy face at him, and slammed the door in his face.

"Hey!" Steve shouted, and Mike begrudgingly opened the door again. "Don't forget to make sure it's okay I'm driving you nerds." He said, and Mike nodded.

He thought about how to get Eleven in the car without breaking any laws all the way to the door, but didn't come up with anything. He knocked the special knock Hopper had taught him at the beginning of the year, and within seconds said policeman had opened the door and was standing gruffly in front of him.

"She'll be out in a second." He glowered, and Mike gulped. He wasn't looking too happy about letting his daughter go out without him yet.

"So, uhm, is - is there a certain time she needs to be back, o-or-"

"Eight. She needs to be home by eight. And don't let her go into any stores, I don't want her on any security cameras. And make sure she buckles in in the car."

Mike gulped again, but nodded. They'd just have to stick Lucas in the trunk or something. They'd be fine.

"You got that, Wheeler? Don't get her too hyped up on sugar, either. She has a hard enough time sleeping as it is. And do *not* try any funny business." Hopper said, using the most authoritative tone he could muster. He really did like the Wheeler kid, at least in general, but he couldn't let his daughter go off with him without giving a few rules.

Scratch that.

A *lot* of rules.

"Uhm, yes sir," Mike paused. Thought a moment, "Oh, uhm.. Mom and Dad got into a fight, and - and so Steve's driving. Is that - is that okay?"

He looked up to Hopper's face, and the man looked as if he was thinking.

"He a safe driver?"

Mike nodded exuberantly.

"Yes, sir, he's an excellent driver, and a really good babysitter."

Hopper took a minute, sighed, and finally nodded.

"Sure, kid. But he'd better not get pulled over, or you're the one I'm blaming."

"Y-yes, sir," Mike stuttered, looking at his feet. As soon as he did so, something rustled from the hallway. "El!"

She stepped into the room nervously, and her hands were playing with the hem of her skirt. She looked up and smiled breathlessly.

"Mike."

Hopper rolled his eyes. They always acted like they hadn't seen each other in years.

Mike took in Eleven's outfit carefully, and grinned up at her after he looked it over. She wore a slightly too big pale pink and blue striped sweater paired with a magenta, knee-length pleated skirt and pale pink stirrup pants that Mike almost laughed thinking about Hopper purchasing, because he was sure those were too new to have belonged to Nancy. Eleven wore them with his old white Converse, and Mike smiled lovingly when he saw them. Even after all this time, and all this wear and tear, she still wore the nasty old things.

"You look pretty." He grinned at her, taking her hands nervously. She grinned herself, and made eye contact with Mike. His grin brightened. "Really, *really* pretty."

Hopper rolled his eyes again. He cleared his throat.

"If you're gonna get there in time, you'd better go."

Mike jumped about five feet away and looked up with wide eyes.

"Yep! Yep, let's go, El, let's skedaddle!"

El giggled, and Mike slapped himself internally. Who even said "skedaddle" nowadays? Losers, that's who. But Eleven didn't seem to mind, and so he walked her out the door, embarrassed.

"Thank you, sir," He said briefly, turning around to look the man in the face. Hopper frowned.

"Go on."

"Yes, sir."

And then they were at the car, and Mike was trying to figure out how to get Eleven into the car and not break Hopper's rule.

"Okay, uhm... Lucas, you, uh.. You just. Scoot over."

"I will not!"

"Okay, fine, Will?"

"My mom will kill me if I don't have a seatbelt on, Mike."

"DUSTIN GET YOUR A** OUT OF THE FRONT"

After five minutes of bickering and giggles and a few disgruntled shouts from Steve, the party was situated in a mostly-safe manner. Dustin remained in the front, and had been laughing at the rest the whole time, but finally they were set. Eleven was next to the window on the left, and Mike was stuck right beside her as close to her side as he could manage. On his right was Will, whose mother had wrapped him *tightly* in winter coats and scarves and jackets, and beside him Lucas, looking rather perturbed as he squished against the window.

"I can't believe Max bailed." He grumped, crossing his arms. In reality, he knew her reasoning was sound - a family dinner with out-of-town relatives - but still he was not very happy that she couldn't join them. Dustin turned back and made a kissy face.

"Aww, poor Lukey boy, without his girlfriend tonight," He lisped. Lucas reached up and smacked his face and Dustin turned away giggling. Will offered Lucas a pat on the knee and a kind smile.

"Don't worry, Lucas. We'll still have fun. If you want, we could get her something and bring it to her place afterwards? I have...." Will emptied his pockets (which was a struggle under all the layers) and looked down to his loot, dismayed. "Seventy-five cents and a melted m&m."

Lucas smiled at his friend and the two started to laugh before El leaned around Mike to see.

"Hmm?" She said, not opening her mouth but still making her confusion known. Will held out his hand and shrugged.

"I am not a rich man." He giggled, and Eleven reached forward to poke at the objects in his hand. She knew what money was, and she also knew she liked coins. She took them from Will and held them carefully in her hand, like they would break, and that made Will and

Lucas laugh again. Eleven looked closer before she noticed the melted chocolate, and as soon as she did she was aware of the sticky substance staining her palm and fingers. She dropped the change instantly, her face going into one of disgust.

Will looked a little forlorn for a moment. "I'm broke." He said softly, before his facade broke and he started to laugh again. Lucas joined him and so did Eleven, simply because it was contagious. Soon the whole car minus Steve was laughing at a joke that was no longer funny, simply just because of the excitement in the air.

As the giggles died down, Dustin handed a wet wipe back to Eleven. The back seat stared at it, and Eleven didn't take it.

"Steve splurged a little since he's been dragging us around so much and he doesn't want us to '*mess the upholstery*'," He imitated Steve using an outlandish 'proper' accent and paused, then whispered. "I think its actually because he may love us just a little,"

The back seat erupted into giggles again, but Eleven still hadn't taken the wipe. She was just staring, and looked slightly confused.

"It's for your hands," Dustin said. Eleven looked at her palms then back up. "Here, hand 'em over,"

Eleven held both hands, still covered in melted chocolate, out to Dustin and he very carefully demonstrated the wet wipe. He cleaned her hands thoroughly and then pulled the wipe up like a magician may do to a table cloth. "*Voila!*"

Eleven looked down at her hands and marvelled. "Voo-la," She imitated, not quite understanding how to make the word sound right. The boys laughed and Mike put an arm around her.

"Are you excited for your first parade, El?"

Eleven thought a moment, making her patented thinkingface, and then nodded. Yes. She was very excited, because she got to spend the evening with her friends. Even if she didn't quite understand what a parade was.

Once they arrived at the square, they had just enough time to look

around at the vendors before settling in, and Steve had a surprise.

"Alright, f**kers, listen up because I'm only saying it once. I'm givin' you each five dollars. Get whatever you want, but don't make yourself sick because if you vomit in my car we're taking it out of *your* allowance. Kapeesh?"

The party nodded enthusiastically and Steve led them up to get in line for concessions. He didn't have a lot of money, but he did have a part time job now, which gave him enough to pamper the kids sometimes. That and if he gave them each some money then they wouldn't whine at him all night. Twenty-five dollars wasn't a whole lot to lose, anyways. He led them up to a line, and gestured for them to run free. Even if running free only meant walking three steps to get in line.

Once in line, and looking at all of the options, Eleven had no idea what to get.

"Mike," She whispered, pulling on the sleeve to his sweater. He looked back curiously and Eleven bit her lip. "Don't know." She said, and Mike picked up on her nerves.

"Well... That's okay," He said, smiling. "How about.. How about we each pick you something and you can try all of it?"

Eleven felt herself nodding and smiling, reaching forward to grab Mike's hand.

"Yes." She said, and Mike's face was turning that funny shade of pink it sometimes did. He looked away and shared his plan with his friends, and they all agreed enthusiastically - Will even offered to get something small himself so Eleven could try "the good stuff" (AKA Cotton Candy) with the remainder of his money. Mike did the same, and eventually the group was sitting on the edge of the street, wrapped in their coats and scarves and surrounded by trash from all of their snacks.

Eleven had ended up with a hot chocolate chosen by Mike, gummy worms from Dustin (Which she soon found out she did not enjoy, much to Dustin's delight as he got the remainder), the Cotton Candy

from Will, a peppermint stick from Lucas, and, finally, picked by herself, a Sprite. She knew she liked the sweet liquid from when she had been sick, and also knew that it could help with tummy aches as she was afraid of getting one from all of these sweets now. She was being logical, and so was Steve, because when he saw all the sugar they had loaded the Chief's daughter down with, he also purchased her a water bottle and gave her the free instructions to "not down all that sugar all at once, kid."

Eleven had taken taken that advice, and due to it, had no signs of a tummy ache. However, that was a lot to drink. She had tried the Hot Chocolate first, and was delighted to find the warm beverage to taste like the chocolate bars Hopper sometimes brought home to her after work. She drank it quickly (and gave Mike a little kiss on the cheek as a thank you, to which all of his friends absolutely *cackled* and Mike went from that funny shade of pink to one of deep crimson.) After that, she tried Will's cotton candy, which she found that she was a very large fan of. She shared the puff of sugar with said friend, and the two laughed together at the color it turned their tongues. It only took one bite of the gummy worms to discover they weren't her style, and soon she was sipping on her Sprite to get the taste out of her mouth.

The parade started right on time, and after a brief explanation from Mike ("All the businesses and stuff in town decorate a car to come through so people can see all the pretty decorations for Christmas, and the Marching band plays Christmas songs to get people in the spirit,") Eleven had really started to enjoy it, laughing with her friends when the Power Company's float was covered in lights that wouldn't work, and getting on their feet and cheering when the Girl Scout float holding Lucas's sister came by. Now she was absently sucking the peppermint stick and had drunk over half of the water bottle watching the parade go by, and she realized something. There was no tummy ache, but she did have to go. *Bad.*

"Mike," She whispered. Mike tore his gaze from the flashing lights of the highschool Dance Team instantly.

"What is it, El?" He asked, still smiling. He saw the uneasy look on her face and his smile dropped. "Are you okay?"

El played with the hem of her skirt and bounced a little on her toes. "Have to go," She said simply, looking at her feet. It was kind of embarrassing to have to elaborate on this.

Mike made a face. "Go? Go where? Are you sick, or hurt, or-" Eleven made a face, her lip stuck out in a pout, and Mike almost slapped himself because it was obvious. "Oh. *Oh*. Hold on, hold on, I'll - I'll figure it out." He said, his voice almost in a panic. "Steve!"

The older boy looked down, his sunglasses obscured slightly by the tinsel that had been thrown on him from a float.

"What's up, Mike-aroni?" He said, a goofy grin present on his face. Mike rolled his eyes.

"Eleven has to go to the bathroom." He said, gesturing to the shorter girl beside him. Steve paused a moment.

"Can she wait a few minutes? Because as soon as this is over, I can take you guys to McDonald's to eat and she can go there," He tried. Mike started to protest, but Eleven cut in.

"*Now*," She said, her hands nervously twisting in the hem of her skirt again. Steve sighed, one hand on his cocked hip and the other now moving to cover his eyes.

"Alright, alright, we'll find somewhere." He paused, seemingly resigned to his fate of leaving the other children alone, when he had a thought. He sighed again. "Anyone else have to go?"

His eyes travelled down his little gaggle of children, and each time his eyes landed on a boy they shook their head. Until he made it to Dustin.

Dustin raised his hand high and proud, and, one by one, following Dustin, three other hands slowly and sheepishly went in to the air. Steve sighed for what felt like the millionth time and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Okay, okay, we'll go. Come on."

Steve then clapped Eleven on the back to push her along, and the

others followed at a slower speed. After a moment, he decided to hurry them along, because Eleven was basically bouncing trying not to wet herself, and he did not want a stern lecture from the Chief about proper child care.

"C'mon, you little gremlins." He said, grabbing Dustin's arm and yanking him ahead. Dustin swatted at him, but within a moment the little group was out of the crowd and standing on the square in the area the Parade would not pass through. "Okay, let's see..."

Soon enough, they had walked into a SEARS.

"Don't worry, El, almost there," Mike smiled, the smaller girl beside him offering a little smile back. It was urgent at this point, but it wasn't scary like many of their other adventures, so she wasn't upset. They were standing at the help desk to inquire about the bathrooms, and Eleven shifted her weight. This was taking *forever*. She had to go *now*. She gave an aggravated little grunt as Steve spoke with the cashier.

"The Men's room's out of order." He deadpanned. The lady at the desk shrugged.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but there's nothing I can do about it. There's a Woolworth's around the corner that should have bathrooms." She said sincerely. Steve sighed, again, and looked at his little pack. The boys could wait till then; every single one of them looked perfectly fine, and Dustin only looked a little antsy, but Eleven looked as if she were about to burst. He turned from the desk.

"Okay, so there's no place for little dudes, but there is a girls' room.." Eleven looked up at that. "We'll have to go next door, but El, you can go here if.. You can go here. Dustin, my boy, you okay waiting?"

Dustin made a face.

"You okay cleaning piss from the floor by yourself?"

Steve sighed. It had to be his catchphrase now - sighing. He tried again.

"Okay. El, the bathroom's right over there." He pointed. "Boys, come

with me, we're going next door. Meet up right on the corner there, okay? I'll be there waiting."

Eleven turned to go, because at this point she really didn't *care* if she'd be alone or not, but Mike stopped her.

"You sure you'll be okay here alone?" He asked, looking around. Being in a store was one of Hopper's no-no's, and Eleven never liked being separated from the group. Steve rolled his eyes.

"Michael Lawrence Wheeler, it's not like you're gonna be separated for an eternity. What are you planning to do, go into the ladies' room with her? Now get your a** over here so we can go."

Mike gave El a sympathetic look. She met his eyes and the two stayed like that for a second, communicating silently that she would be fine and that he would be fine, too. Steve whistled to hurry it along, and Mike turned.

"The corner, okay? As soon as you're done."

And then the boys had walked out, and Eleven instantly dashed for the bathrooms.

Five minutes later, she was out and her hands were washed, and she was walking back through the store to find her boys. She felt ever so much better now, and was really looking forward to seeing the rest of the parade, so she moved fast and with purpose.

She shivered a little as she opened the door at the little burst of cold air, but she recovered and looked up quickly to find...

No one.

Her boys were no where to be found, and Eleven was beginning to panic. That tummy ache she feared earlier was present now for a different reason.

Now, rationally, she knew that everything was fine. She may have finished faster than her party, or maybe they were looking for her elsewhere. She could even find them if she thought hard enough. But...

She couldn't do this, she really couldn't. She looked around, frantically, and her voice made involuntary little whines. She could not *see them*. She could not *feel them*. Maybe she was thinking too hard to sense them, or maybe her brain was just racing so much it made her feel panicky, but she couldn't do it right now. They were *gone*, she was in an unfamiliar place, and she was *alone*. Even if it was just Steve here, she'd be alright - he *babysat* her sometimes when Hopper went on *dates* (Which Hopper soon explained to her that he wasn't *actually* coming to sit on babies, and that he wasn't going out with oversized raisins). Even if she and Steve were not close, she still felt some level of comfort around him. Not as much as with her friends, but still.

But right now there was *no one*. She couldn't see Mike. She couldn't see Will. She couldn't see Dustin, Lucas, or Steve. And she was full on *panicking*. She could not breath, could not think, could not see because all of the bustle and swarms of people around her were blurring her vision. Her eyes could not focus on one thing and she was trying, desperately trying to find her friends because if she couldn't find them then she wasn't *safe*, and she couldn't find them.

She was sobbing now, but she wasn't really aware of that. What she was aware of was how *alone* she was, but of course that wasn't bad enough - She was alone, surrounded by *strangers* - surrounded by people who could be *unsafe*, who could want to *hurt* her. They were mostly too tall for her to see their faces, and Eleven turned around in an unsteady circle to try and find her friends. She shouted out, a weak little yell, and a tall woman gave her a dirty look. She didn't like that look, and it just made her cry harder. She heard the sounds of the parade, but they weren't as joyous as they were before - all she could hear was the blaring of police sirens, the screaming of trumpets, the pounding of her little heart in her ears. She began to curl in on herself, tucking her chin into her chest and covering her ears. Her knees buckled, and she began to fall forward when all of the noise became too much. It was too loud, too loud, too loud, and she was alone, alone, alone, so very unsafe, and afraid and surrounded by strangers, unsafe strangers, unsafe noises, *where were her friends*, and she could not think, could not be rational, and she *screamed*.

Her scream was loud, but that wasn't all. Her hoarse shriek was accompanied by the swarm of people around her falling back by an unseen force.

It wasn't too big, not enough to cause trouble, but adults wavered and children tripped at the unseen and strong force, and there was Eleven in the middle of it, curled up on the ground like an armadillo, her body wracked with silent sobs. It was quiet around her for a few moments before a small murmur arose about the cause. It was probably just a gust of wind, most of them reasoned, and Eleven couldn't make herself care about their guesses. Her nose was bleeding and was mixing messily with her tears now, staining her sweater and the knees of her pants, but, just like the people, she couldn't care. She was too distraught.

It felt like hours before they found her, but in reality it was only six minutes.

"Holy s**t, kids, shut the he** up!" Steve chided as they walked out of the Woolworth's. They had gotten distracted. He had noticed them - no, *heard* them - through the glass, arguing over something in the middle of the store. He had rolled his eyes and gone in, trusting that Eleven would be fine if she came out before he got back, because if he didn't go in there right now he was sure they would knock over the entire store.

He stomped in, found out what the squabble was about, grabbed Dustin by the ear, and they were on their way out when he spotted it.

It had gotten much more crowded since he had entered the Woolworth's, and he was sure the parade was almost over because this is what it normally looked like when everyone was fighting to get out, thinking they'd be smart and beat traffic by leaving a little early. They weren't smart, of course, because they still all decided to leave at once, but that wasn't what he noticed.

What he noticed was the small pulsation of the crowd surrounding a certain area. Giving a certain area a wide berth before they were seemingly pushed outward, some even falling.

"Oh, sh*t."

Mike pushed passed him just he realized what was happening, and the others were quick to follow him. Steve ran after, trying to keep everyone in sight, and they had to push past the crowd to get to what they were sure was Eleven.

Sure enough, it was, and she was curled up in the middle of the concrete. You could tell just from looking at her that she had been sobbing, and before Steve could think of a plan Mike was at her side.

"El?! Eleven, hey, El, look at me, look," He was saying, whispering frantically, touching her, reminding her he was there. She looked up slowly, her face bloody and tearstained, and Mike instantly hugged her.

"You're okay, you're okay, I'm right here," He said softly, petting her back and planting little kisses in her curly hair. Steve gaped at how well he was handling the situation, and how the other kids were staying back, but not in a panicked way.

They looked like trained professionals, while Steve was standing there gaping like a fish out of water.

Slowly, Eleven began to straighten, just a little, and she leaned into Mike heavily. She sniffed and then wiped some blood from her nose.

"See, we're all here." Mike whispered to her. He was on his knees now, and didn't even care about the few people who were watching. "Will's right there, and Dustin, and Lucas, and there's Steve. You're not alone, you're okay,"

After close to ten minutes, Mike had gotten Eleven up. She was leaning on him, but was smiling a little at Dustin's jokes, and was squeezing Will's hand, and was thankful for the occasional pats Lucas gave her back. Steve stood behind them, herding them like a mama duck, wondering what he would tell Hopper.

"C'mon, El, we might make it back in time to see Santa!" Will grinned, and the group walked just a little faster back through the crowds to their spot. Eleven held tightly to Will's hand, and leaned heavily on Mike, and laughed happily at how Lucas and Dustin were trying to cheer her up.

They did, in fact, make it back to see Santa. Eleven laughed along with the others at the jolly old man, and listened happily to the conversations being had over McDonald's dinner. Steve deposited her at home and waited as she and Mike shared a very chaste goodnight kiss. He walked up after Mike and talked to Hopper, explaining the mishap of the night, but how everything was okay now.

When Eleven started school the next year, Panic Attacks were listed on her forms.